



## Improving the Health of Puget Sound, our Rivers, Streams and other State Aquatic Lands

### AN UPDATE ON DNR'S PROPOSED AQUATIC LANDS HABITAT CONSERVATION PLAN

Washington owns 2.6 million acres of lands that lie beneath our state's navigable lakes, rivers, and marine waters, and estuaries and many beaches. These aquatic lands are managed for all the people of the state for many benefits. The Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is manager and steward of the state aquatic lands and works to ensure their sustainability into the future. We have a long-term commitment to restore and protect these ecosystems that people and wildlife depend upon.

Healthy marine and fresh waters are paramount to the people of Washington—and to DNR. A critical resource for maintaining clean water and a healthy habitat for wildlife, aquatic lands are also the foundation of our economy, quality of life and the natural heritage we will pass to generations to come.

DNR is working with the Puget Sound Partnership to restore the Sound to health by 2020. As called for in the Partnership's 2020 Action Agenda for Puget Sound, and to protect other aquatic lands throughout the state, DNR is developing a **Habitat Conservation Plan** that for fifty years will guide management activities to protect water quality and habitat so that the thousands of diverse aquatic species may thrive for years to come.



DNR scientist Jeff Gaekle and WDFW Scientist Dan Doty, assess eelgrass at President Point, Kitsap Peninsula. Photo: Shayne Cothem

### Habitat Conservation Plan

A Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) helps a landowner (DNR for the state) protect species that have been listed as at some risk of extinction under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA). At the same time it is an agreement that would give DNR and industry certainty while carrying out activities. An HCP is a landscape-wide plan that provides the rules of the roads for activities proposed to occur or impact aquatic lands. It emphasizes wildlife conservation and ecosystem health as the basis for strong long-term management. Under an HCP, strategies are developed to protect both ESA-listed species and aquatic habitats. In return for adhering to the conservation measures of the HCP, DNR would not be faulted should a listed species or habitat be unintentionally harmed.

### Proposal for a future with habitat protection and management certainty

The proposed Aquatic Lands Habitat Conservation Plan will help protect Puget Sound, our river systems and other state aquatic lands statewide by guiding management activities that:

- Avoid or minimize adverse impacts to species that are protected under the Endangered Species Act.
- Provide long-term certainty and stability for those who lease aquatic lands from DNR.
- Provide habitat mitigation or 'compensation' for unavoidable impacts through either rectifying the impact, or restoring other nearby (and like) habitat.

- Preserve the economic and recreation benefits derived from the use of state-owned aquatic lands.

## **Science-based decisions build the HCP**

The proposed habitat conservation plan is based on peer-reviewed science and other literature. This information provides the guidance for adopting conservation measures so that DNR's management will reduce environmental impacts to aquatic species and improve the health of aquatic ecosystems.

During the past 5 years, at-risk species have been identified and a draft HCP developed. The DNR has written the draft with the input of a broad range of scientists, industry experts, conservation organizations, and agency representatives. We also worked with the Federal Services (National Marine Fisheries Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service) as we investigated conservation options. DNR staff continues to meet with all interested parties.

Nearing completion of this process, DNR soon will begin negotiations jointly with the Federal Services to develop the final proposal that will undergo a rigorous environmental and public review through the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process.

## **Moving forward to begin important changes**

DNR is legislatively mandated to protect the environmental health of aquatic lands in its care, and is committed to working with the Puget Sound Partnership to clean up the Sound by 2020, and protect it into the future.

To best comply with the laws and commitments, we utilize the best available scientific literature to guide our leasing decisions. The scientific research carried out for the HCP has shown that specific measures need to be taken regarding use of state-owned aquatic lands. Therefore, where appropriate, DNR will begin incorporating these measures in leases and other use agreements as soon as this fall. These measures are outcome based, and we can work with lessees to achieve the conservation goals in ways that work best for each lessee.

## **2010 Supplemental Budget Request**

\$.98 million 2010 supplemental appropriation request:

- From Aquatic Lands Enhancement Account (ALEA) – funds are available;
- To complete the HCP science, drafting, public comment process, and permitting with the Federal Services within the biennium; and
- Biennialize the request at \$1.47 million to:
  - Implement the HCP's conservation measures.

For more information about how DNR is moving forward on the Aquatic Lands Habitat Conservation Plan, please contact David Palazzi, our HCP manager, 360-902-1069, david.palazzi@dnr.wa.gov.